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TO: Dr. Joel Boyd, Superintendent of Schools  
FROM: Liam Skinner, Chief Schools Officer  
DATE: February 11, 2022  
RE: Request for COVID -19 Temporary Adjustment to Current Retention, Promotion  
and Attendance Policies

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COVID-19 has had a direct and significant negative impact on student attendance this school year, leading us to examine the district's retention, promotion and attendance more closely for projected impacts to students as well as fidelity and equitable implementation of policy across schools. Following initial discussions with school and district leaders, I am recommending a temporary adjustment to the following policies to ensure consistency, equity and fairness across schools and to allow for school leaders to consider supports needed to address students' varying needs and barriers that are resulting in high chronic absenteeism and subsequent learning loss:

- IKE-R - PROMOTION/RETENTION POLICY, MIDDLE SCHOOL
- 2021-22 LOWELL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT HANDBOOK, ATTENDANCE SECTION, PG 49

These documents are attached. Also attached are recommended adjustments reflected in red font.

Rates of daily attendance in our schools have tracked rates of COVID-19, with student attendance significantly adversely impacted by the pandemic. In the second quarter of the current school year, a preliminary calculation of the district average daily attendance (ADA) was 84%, a decrease from 90% in the first quarter. In contrast, for several years prior to the pandemic annual ADA was 94%. In addition, our current year-to-date chronic absenteeism rate is estimated at 43%. Nearly half of these chronically absent students experienced excused absences due to Covid-19 quarantine. However, even when adjusted for excused absences, it is clear that attendance has decreased from pre-pandemic times.

These temporary adjustments will allow school leaders to consider supports that address our increased absenteeism. They will also enable a thorough review of the current data and barriers to attendance in order to develop a comprehensive plan that directs resources to educational recovery for future years. I am also recommending that a larger policy discussion on retention, promotion and attendance policies be held prior to the start of the 2022-23 school year.

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